

To Be A Viking

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Summary: Astrid Hofferson knew what it was to be a Viking. She knew how to wield her axe with precision and knew how to kill a dragon if the need ever arose. She did not think that her mind was ever going to be changed, especially by Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III.

Pre-Hiccstrid in HTTYD. Two-shot.

## 1. The Old and New Axe

**\*\*Disclaimer: Dreamworks owns How To Train Your Dragon\*\***

**\*\*To Be A Viking: Chapter One: The Old and New Axe\*\***

**\*\*AN: So obviously I got a little obsessed with HTTYD, which isn't really a good thing because I've got so many other fics I could be writing, but I couldn't help it! It has been theorized that Astrid already had budding feelings for Hiccup before he took her on the "Romantic Flight" so I'm kind of just expanding on that. This story follows Astrid as she goes through her journey from Dragon Killer Trainee to Dragon Rider. Some pieces of this chapter include two deleted scenes that never made it to the cut.\*\***

\* \* \*

><p>Astrid Hofferson was thirteen when her whole world came crashing down. She had sat completely still before Chief Stoick in his home, unable to comprehend what had been said.<p>

"No," she'd whispered. "You're \_wrong!\_ My mother and father were too-" The words faded, clogged in her throat. They were \_too good\_, \_too smart\_ to be killed by dragons, it just wasn't possible.

Stoick's eyes held understanding. Astrid knew the story about his wife, Valka, who had been eaten by dragons much like her own parents.

"I am terribly sorry, Astrid," he said in his low voice, mournful to her ears. "All we could recover was this."

Astrid hardly noticed as he placed her father's helmet and her mother's metal shoulder pads into her hands. They were cool to the touch and Astrid wished she could stop the tears that fell, peppering the metal. Vikings weren't supposed to cry! She wasn't supposed to cry! She was Astrid Hofferson! The pride of the Hofferson clan!

But Astrid couldn't force the tears back into her eyes or staunch the flow of them, no matter how strongly she willed it. She bowed her head over the helmet and pads.

"Is the-is the dragon dead?" she rasped, her heart beating painfully in her chest.

"Yes, Astrid, you don't need to worry about that," he said, reaching out, but she shied away.

"Their weaponsâ€|were they destroyed?" she asked.

"Gobber has the remnantsâ€|he could re-forge them if you like?"

But Astrid didn't answer.

"Astrid," the man said kindly, "we need to talk about you."

"Why?"

"Astrid, you're only thirteen-

"I've reached majority age!" Astrid snapped out, suddenly full of fire. This was a conversation her parents had had with her countless times, and countless times she had shot them down. Marriage. It wasn't seen as out of the ordinary for girls her age to marry, in fact, it was quite common, but that didn't mean that Astrid liked it any. She wanted the freedom to choose, to do anything really. She didn't want to be tied down to some man as a trophy of beauty, she wanted to be her own person, to breathe and fight as a Viking regardless of her gender or marital status.

"I will not marry," she finished, "I don't need to."

Her father had been suggesting Snotlout Jorgenson, the nephew of Stoick, as a possible husband. Astrid had gagged. He was the ideal Viking; strong and excellent with weaponsâ€|and not very intelligent. But he wasn't Astrid's ideal at all.

Astrid had her eyes set on someone else entirely.

She stood suddenly, clamping her hands on the only things left from her parents that she would ever get. "Excuse me." And she strode away, opening the door and turning swiftly at the muffled complaint at the movement.

Blue eyes met green and Astrid found herself captivated. Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III's eyes had always seemed much brighter and much more expressive than his father, Stoick's. Hiccup's cheeks

flushed with color that darkened the longer she stared at him and she quickly forced her eyes from him, her cheeks a faint pink, her fingers tightening on the items in her hands as she left.

Hiccup watched her go, a frown on his face. It was no secret that he had a massive crush on her, practically everyone on the island knew that, except, thankfully, her (or so he thought). She was fierce and strong and relentless and beautiful, how could someone not fall for her with all those traits?

For someone as tough as her, it was strange to see her so down-trodden, but her parents had just been killed, so she had every right to be. He had never seen her cry before, and that was startling by itself. He only knew the loss of a single parent, granted he didn't even have any memories of his mother when she'd been killed, but the loss of both of them at the same time must have been even worse, especially considering that she'd known them for thirteen years.

His frown deepened as he stared after her. She had asked about her parents' weapons hadn't she? Maybe he could help with that, if nothing else. And so he made towards the forge hoping that Gobber hadn't done anything with the weapons.

Astrid wanted to kill something so bad by the time she got back to her empty house.

"Behold the Hoffersons," she told herself mockingly in a frigid voice, "one of the strongest clans that Berk has to offer, now scaled down to one survivor."

She and her parents were the last of a dying clan. Her grandfather had died years ago, her uncle Finn perished to a Zippelback when she was a child, and her aunt Greda had died out at sea attempting to pay tribute to Odin by sailing to the edge of the world.

She was alone.

Astrid beat her fists against the door until her knuckles throbbed and bled and it was only then that she let out a cry of frustration. It wasn't \_fair!\_ Why did her parents of all people have to be the ones that died? They were \_good!\_ They were \_strong!\_ Astrid could only sink to the ground and sob like she never had before, feeling for once as though she was the thirteen year old girl that she was. She cried out of pain, out of sorrow, and out of exhaustion until the only this she could do was nod off against the door.

The next morning she would awaken to find her father's axe-blade re-forged onto a longer haft that suited her perfectly even if she would have to grow into using the weight of it.

And she smiled and one green-eyed boy was the only one to see it.

\* \* \*

><p>By age fourteen Astrid had quite adapted to using the axe, but it still needed to be sharpened before dragon training began, so she headed towards the forge with a spring in her step. And that was not because of one someone who had caught her eye.<p>

Astrid didn't remember the first time she met Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III, to her it had been as if he had suddenly popped into her life; green-eyed, covered in freckles, and completely horrible at dragon-slaying. He was everything she wasn't, and in a way it fascinated her. He was rather intelligent, of course, any of his inventions could attest to that, and rather cute (though she would never say that out loud), but he was so thin and lanky and without any Viking skill...So why was it that she couldn't resist glancing at him out of the corner of her eye? Why was it that her heart beat a little faster when she was around him? And she couldn't help but love the way his eyebrows scrunched together when he was concentrating, or the way he flopped his hands around when he spoke.

And when she'd glance at him, he'd already be looking and would blush pink and shift his eyes away quickly, and that was exhilarating.

Her parents would not have approved, she knew that well enough; he was too un-Viking.

"Don't take it to heart, kid," Gobber said from within, making her pause before announcing her entrance. "It's his job to be tough on everyone!"

"I'm not everyone," Hiccup complained before sighing and muttering in a resigned voice. "But it doesn't matter." He exhaled lowly, picking up a pair of prongs. "The guy is impossible to please." He handed the prongs to Gobber who used them to pry a steaming sword from the stone it had been forged from, depositing it in water to cool.

"He just doesn't want to appear to be playing favorites," Gobber said wisely.

"He's covered in that department, believe me," Hiccup said dryly as Gobber lifted the sword to take it to the anvil to reshape it, and he rushed to assist. "If I didn't live in the same house with him, I wouldn't even know he was my father."

Astrid winced where she stood. It sounded like Hiccup and his father were still having a bunch of issues, then. And it hadn't really helped that Hiccup had supposedly cut down a Nightfury earlier in the previous night. Astrid said supposedly, because he'd said this several times before. Hiccup, sadly, took village idiot to a whole new level.

Gobber banged a hammer down on the blade. "Have you told him that?" he demanded.

"Of course not! We barely even make eye contact," Hiccup grumbled, flipping the blade. "And when we do, it's always this disappointed scowl like he's been cheated or like someone skimmed on the meat in his sandwich." His eyebrows furrowed into one of his own scowls before doing a surprisingly good impersonation of his father's voice. "'\_Excuse me, barmaid? I'm afraid you've brought me the wrong offspring! I ordered an extra large boy with beefy arms! Extra guts and glory on the side! This here, this is a talking fish bone!'"\_

Gobber chuckled at his apt impersonation of his father. "No, no, you're thinking about this all wrong," he told him, "it's not so much what you look like, it's what's inside that he can't stand."

Astrid face-palmed. Wow, Gobber, wait to go with that blunt insult.

Hiccup's face was as wry as his voice. "Thank you, for summing that up for me."

"No," Gobber said in an off-hand sort of way, "I mean, there's the Viking way and then there's your way. And your way makes grown men uncomfortable."

"Speaking of uncomfortable, I'd like a new conversation please," Hiccup said in the same wry voice as before.

"Alright," Gobber conceded, his uni-brow wagging a bit, "how's it going with the ladies?"

"Oh, yeah, way to get the mood back on track," Hiccup said with heavy sarcasm.

"Ah, come on!" Gobber said grinning devilishly. "I've seen the way you look at Astrid."

Astrid took a step back, her cheeks flushing a bit, but she couldn't keep a smile from forming.

"Please. Astrid wouldn't come near me if she was on fire and I had the only bucket of water in the town," Hiccup said, crossing his arms uncomfortably.

"Hey." Astrid stepped forward, balancing her axe over her shoulder, startling the pair of them, which made her smirk. "Can I get this sharpened?"

"Astrid!" His green eyes widened at the sight of her and then his cheeks pinked. "Hi, Astrid. Hello, there. Welcome. What can I do-"

She hoisted the axe off her shoulder and lodging it into wood.

"Heyâ€|" Hiccup trailed off a bit nervously.

"My, uh, manly apprentice here will service all of your needs," Gobber said, shoving Hiccup forward and towards Astrid who could only raise an eyebrow, he didn't seem to notice Hiccup's glare. "I have to goâ€|getâ€|someâ€|I'm just gonna go outside." And he quickly made himself scarce.

Hiccup chuckled nervously, meeting her eyes. "Gobber."

Astrid didn't comment, she only pulled her axe out of the wood and held it out to him, but the weight of it was greater than he recalled and he almost dropped it.

"Okay," he grunted under the weight, "Razor-sharp battle axe coming right up."

"Careful!" Astrid had to add as he accidentally dragged it along the floor, fighting the urge to go over and wrench it from him; it was

one of her most prized possessions. "That's my father's."

"I know." Hiccup had spoken out of reflex, recognizing his own handwork easily and didn't even realize what he had said.

Astrid froze. He knew? How could he have known unless her heart beat a little quicker had he been the one to forge it for her?

"So," Hiccup said, not noticing the internal thoughts plaguing her, "I-I saw you guys on fire patrol last night. Looked like a good time."

Astrid grinned. "Am I making you nervous?"

"What? No! \_No-no-no!"\_ But his cheeks flooded with color. "Why would you ask that?"

"You're stuttering," Astrid said, crossing her arms, "you only do that when you're nervous."

Hiccup stared at her. How did she even know that?

Astrid coughed suddenly, realizing what she had said. "But it was alright, fire patrol, I mean, no burns, though."

"Oh wait, you shouldn't-"

Astrid had pushed aside a small side door to reveal a number of sketches and diagrams covering a small table and the walls of the small room. "What is all of this?"

"Oh, um, those?" Hiccup said nervously, making to approach her. "Nothing. Just some stuff I'm working on. It's just confidential, upper level development. I can't really talk about it so"

Confidential, upper level development? Astrid stifled her amusement to examine a few sketches with interest. "The Mutilator," she read aloud.

She could hear the sigh in his voice. "Yes, yes. Basically it uses twin-weighted counter-levers to launch crisscrossing blades in four different directions."

"Impressive," she mused to herself, not noticing the pleased grin that wormed its way onto Hiccup's face. "How do you hold it?" She wouldn't have minded a weapon like that; it sounded handy.

"Oh, you don't," Hiccup said quickly, eager to keep the conversation going. This was probably the longest she'd ever talked to him, probably to anyone in the past year. And she wasn't glaring at him like the way she did towards his cousin, Snotlout, whenever he tried to flirt with her or impress her. Hiccup's heart soared. "You shoot it."

"Oh," Astrid said with a bit of disappointment, "that's too bad, I'm more of a hands-on kind of girl." She blushed once she realized what she had just said. "I-I mean I prefer using my axe, is all." She brushed a few blonde strands out of her eye. She sighed. "At least

tomorrow will be better," she said more to herself than to Hiccup, but he caught the words all the same.

He scrunched his eyebrows together in confusion. "You're happyâ€¦to wave goodbye?" The ships would be leaving in the morning for the search for the dragon's home island, striking at the source, or so his father said. But none of them even knew where to start looking other than the general direction.

Astrid laughed and it rang in his ears. "No, stupid, they need replacements to defend the town; we start training in the morning, fighting dragons."

Hiccup gave a forlorn sigh as he finished the axe and handed it back to her. "Good luck."

He turned away and Astrid wondered if she had said something wrong. Maybe he was still down about what he had done during the attack the day previously.

"Hiccupâ€¦"

"Hm?"

Astrid contemplated her words. "You've got a brilliant mindâ€¦you just have to aim better, that's all."

Hiccup could only watch her go, the heat returning to his cheeks. Gobber should take a leaf out of Astrid's book on how to give a compliment and advice at the same time.

\* \* \*

><p>Astrid was awake when the sun rose, out in the forest throwing her new and improved axe. Whatever Hiccup had doneâ€¦it was lighter and sharper; in short, she loved it.<p>

"\_Hah!\_" She vaulted into the air, swinging with all her might, lodging it fast into the trunk of a pine that trembled dangerously as she removed it.

She grinned, twisting it in her hand. "I'm liking this."

The sun was a quarter of the way up on the horizon when she finally paused her training to strap the axe to her back and head back into town which was already looking quite vacant. The forge was empty, as was the Great Hall, and the Armory was missing a little over half of its weapons.

The ships seemed to be just about to set sail as she descended to the docks and the warriors seemed to be saying a few last goodbyes to their families, so Astrid kept a polite distance.

She didn't know why she came down to the docks every time the ships left. It wasn't as though she had anyone to say farewell to. Her parents were in Valhalla and they weren't coming back. She mostly came down to the dock out of habit, from doing it so many times as a child, but it always irritated her nowadays.

These Vikings had families, people to say goodbye to. Astrid didn't

have anyone. She ground her teeth together as she watched Snotlout hug his father and Fishlegs embrace both of his parents. They were the lucky ones, really.

And then there was Hiccup standing awkwardly holding a one-sided axe that didn't suit him at all. He was standing several feet away from his father and determinedly avoiding his eye (Stoick the Vast was impressive on his own, but Astrid doubted that that was why he wouldn't meet his eye).

"I'll be back," she could hear the chief tell his son, "probably."

A real comfort to Hiccup, no doubt.

"And I'll be hereâ€¦maybe," Hiccup said in return.

Astrid felt pity for the pair. They just looked so awkward together! She had to wonder if maybe Hiccup was too much like his mother and that was why Stoick reacted this way to his only heir. Gobber apparently shared her thinking because he came up to stand between them making a noise of exasperation as he looked back and forth as if waiting for one of them to make the first move, but they didn't.

"Hiccup would like to say that he'll miss you and he wishes that you'll find that Thor-forsaken dragon's nest," Gobber said for Hiccup though Astrid wasn't sure Hiccup would have actually said it if it had been up to him, "so you can stop taking out your frustrations on everyone, namely poor Gobber." Or namely poor Hiccup.

Gobber turned his attention back Hiccup who turned a little more away and he sighed. "Stoick wants to tell you that he'll be thinking of you the whole time, so train hard, don't throw a house party, and he'll do his best not to be eaten by a sea serpent or dragon. But if he does! Well, you know, that's that."

"We're Vikings. It's an occupational hazard," Stoick said before jumping into the ship and glowering at Gobber, "I want him back with all limbs intact. Set sail!"

Hiccup ducked his head lower, not even noticing as Astrid strode past him to sit on the edge of the dock as the ships pulled away and the families and children headed up the ramp to the main level of the isle to return to their houses, but Astrid stayed behind.

She stayed and watched as the sun rose in the sky and the sea turned a lighter blue. She stayed and watched as the ships got smaller and smaller until they could have been tiny parchment boats set out on the water by children, only to sink in a matter of seconds.

"Is it strange watching them go?"

Astrid looked up to meet Gobber's eyes as he flumped heavily down beside her. "What d'you mean?" she asked despite knowing what exactly it was that he was talking about.

"Is it strange to watch them go and knowing your mum and dad aren't going with them?" Gobber elaborated, twisting the hook on his stump for a hand.



Astrid frowned intensely at the man. "Yes," she said finally, "but I don't mind watching."

"Eh, we all watch in the end," Gobber said sagely, "don't worry. They'll turn around eventually, once Stoick realizes that he has no idea where they're going."

Astrid raised a light eyebrow. "Shouldn't you be telling this to Hiccup?" she queried.

"Y'think he actually wants to hear it? Nah." Gobber could only shake his head. "Stubborn as his father, that one."

"Is that meant to be a compliment or an insult?" Astrid asked dryly.

"A bit of both," Gobber said digging into his ear. "You ready for dragon training?"

"Absolutely," Astrid promised with a grin. She was always ready to kill some dragons.

"Best get some more training and sleep in, then," Gobber advised, "it's going to be a long few weeks."

But Astrid didn't mind; anything for some well deserved revenge.

**\*\*AN:** Let me know what you all think, this is my first attempt at Hiccup and this idea has been bouncing around in my head for a few days so I just had to write it out, or at least start it. Tell me if you think it's any good, because it's a little iffy to me right now.**\*\***

**\*\*REVIEW! \*\***

## 2. Conflicted

**\*\*Disclaimer:** Dreamworks owns How To Train Your Dragon**\*\***

**\*\*To Be A Viking: Chapter Two: Conflicted\*\***

**\*\*AN:** Thanks for the positive responses! They really made my day! To Q-A the Authoress, you mentioned Fearless Finn, but it never said whether he'd been killed by the Flightmare, only that he had dishonored the family, so I elaborated on it a bit.**\*\***

\* \* \*

><p>Despite Astrid being hyped for dragon training to begin, she didn't sleep well that night. The only thing she dreamed of was a night bright with dragon-fire and the screams and yells the pierced the silence, the voices of her parents echoing in her head. When she woke up she hardly felt refreshed, but that wasn't going to stop her from being at the top of her game for dragon training.<p>

"Morning' babe."

Annoyance flickered across Astrid's face as Snotlout Jorgenson

lumbered over to her with a smug grin on his face, coming to close to her for her liking. She viciously suppressed a shudder; and this was the boy that her parents had wanted her to marry? She resisted gagging at the thought. She'd rather throw herself off Berk and to drown in the seas of Njārr. Why oh why did he have to be in the same training group as her?

And he wasn't alone.

The other new recruits consisted of Fishlegs Ingerman, a larger boy who had a habit of spouting out random information about dragons, and the twins, Ruffnut and Tuffnut Thorston who had spent too much time ramming their heads together so much so that Astrid wondered if there was any hope for their brains.

Astrid sped up to avoid Snotlout.

"Hey, Babe, where're you going?" She clenched her hand tightly around her newly sharpened axe.

"Dude, she's never gunna give you the time of day," Tuffnut snorted. "Just give up!"

"No turning back," Astrid murmured to herself once she was much closer to the arena. This was her chance, her chance to prove herself as a Viking!

"I hope I get some serious burns," Tuffnut said in excitement.

"I'm hoping for some mauling," Ruffnut said, rolling her shoulders, "like on my shoulder or lower back."

In the village, scars were a symbol of strength and sacrifice. "Yeah," Astrid said in an off-hand manner, "its only fun if you get a scar out of it."

"Yeah, no kidding, right?" a low sarcastic voice commented from behind. Astrid arched an eyebrow at Hiccup's presence; wasn't killing dragons not his thing? "Pain. Love it."

"Oh, \_great,"\_ Tuffnut complained. "Who let him in?"

He looked as uncomfortable holding that axe as he had the day before, and even more so surrounded by kids who often made fun of him (not including Astrid, of course).

"Let's get started," Gobber, who was the 'instructor' for dragon training, called to them all. "The recruit who does best will win the honor of killing his (His? Astrid thought darkly. Try her.) first dragon in front of the entire village."

"Hiccup already killed a Night Fury," Snotlout interjected, "so does that disqualify him orâ€|?"

Astrid narrowed her eyes as Hiccup's face became more downtrodden. She lodged her axe into the ground, making all eyes turn to her briefly, but she paid them no mind, hers meeting Hiccup's as she tossed him a barely perceptible wink before turning back to head towards the barred doors where the other kids were congregating.

Gobber wasn't blind, not by a long shot, so he could see something was going on. Hiccup's one-sided crush didn't seem quite so one-sided after all. Though what Hiccup had done to get on Astrid Hofferson's radar, he didn't know, but he kind of wanted to.

He gave Hiccup a few words of encouragement that weren't really encouraging before he pushed him into line with the rest of them. Hiccup flinched a little at the roars from within the reinforced doors that trembled as if something inside was straining to escape.

"Behind these doors," Gobber began, "are just a few of the many species you will learn to fightâ€¦|The Deadly Nadderâ€¦|"

Fishlegs' feverish whispers weren't that hard to make out. "Speed eight, armor sixteen."

"The Hideous Zipplebackâ€¦|"

"Plus eleven, stealth time two," Fishlegs added, his excitement bubbling just under the surface.

"The Monstrous Nightmareâ€¦|" Gobber continued, gesturing to each iron-wrought door as he passed them by, indicating which dragon was inside each.

"Firepower fifteen."

"The Terrible Terrorâ€¦|"

"Attack eight," Fishlegs breathed, "venom twelve."

"Can you stop that?!" Gobber snapped suddenly to the boy. Astrid couldn't blame him; Fishlegs could be quite annoying when he wanted to be. "Andâ€¦|the Gronckleâ€¦|" And then he surprised them by reaching for the lever that would lift the cross-beam and release the dragon into the arena. Astrid tensed automatically, her grip tightening over her axe hilt.

"Whoa, whoa, wait!" Snotlout spoke up quickly, distinctly startled. "Aren't you gunna teach us first?!"

"I believe," Gobber said with an amused grin as he pulled down the lever, "in learning on the job!"

\_Excellent.\_ Astrid was sure that her grin might've been just a tad feral, but currently she didn't quite care as the doors blew open and the Gronckle flew out, making all of the teens scatter.

"Today is about survival." Was it just her or was he a little too cheerful? "If you get blasted, you're dead." The Gronckle accidentally rammed into the side of the wall, disoriented from its stay inside the cage, before shaking its head and seeing to right itself. "Quick, what's the first thing you're going to need?"

"A doctor?" Hiccup demanded.

"Plus five speed?" Fishlegs offered.

"A shield!" Astrid called, still ready for an attack.

"Shields!" Gobber agreed. "Go!"

Not needing a second order, the kids raced around the arena in search of a shield. Astrid found one without too much difficulty, but Tuffnut and Ruffnut were already fighting over one.

"Your most important piece of equipment is your shield," Gobber said, still in teacher-mode, "If you must make a choice between a sword or a shield, take the shield."

The twins didn't notice that dragon was aiming at them until it was too late and the shield was cinders between them and were in dazed heaps on the ground.

"Ruffnut, Tuffnut, you're out!"

Astrid barely heard their complaints as she held the shield protectively before her with one arm, the other still on her axe as she cautiously approached the dragon.

Gronckles weren't very impressive in their appearance, but that didn't mean that they didn't pack a big punch. They were small (though much larger than the Terrible Terrors) and slow by dragon standards and heavy with a clubbed tail, their fire attacks were quite devastating. They had a shot limit of six at a time, but the more rocks they ate, faster they would be able to refill the shot limit.

"Those shields are good for another thing," Gobber added. "Noise. Make lots of it to throw off a dragon's aim."

Astrid banged her axe against the metal frame of her shield, the chink of metal on metal echoing as the others followed her example. She watched in interest as the Gronckle shook itself, its eyes rolling in confusion.

"All dragons have a limited number of shots. How many does a Gronckle have?"

"Five?" Snotlout offered as he raced around the smallish dragon.

"No, six!" Fishlegs corrected.

"Correct, six, that's one for each of you!" Gobber chuckled a little at that as Fishlegs' shield was shot out of his hand and he was sent running. "Fishlegs, out! Hiccup get in there!"

His words were followed by a startled cry, but Astrid didn't chance the boy a look; taking your eyes off of the enemy never went well for Vikings, especially if their enemy was a dragon. Astrid then had to stifle a curse as the Gronckle fastened its eyes on her and Snotlout's voice was uttered behind her. \_Son of a half-troll!\_ She tensed ready to dodge at the last second.

"So, anyways, I'm moving into my parents' basement," he was saying, no doubt grinning in that way that she didn't particularly care for. "You should come by sometime to work out."

She ducked to the side, cart-wheeling out of the way before she could be hit by a blast from the Gronckle.

"You look like you work out-" She resisted tossing him a glare. She looked like she worked out? She trained hard; she didn't particularly care what she looked like.

He gave a short cry as the blast struck his shield, burning through it and throwing Snotlout back from the force of it.

"Snotlout! You're done!"

It was just her and Hiccup as she flipped into a standing position beside him—that wasn't necessarily a good thing. As much as she liked Hiccup, he could be a bit—foolish, she should say. The only reason that he was the last one besides her was because he had been hiding and was small enough to not be taken seriously; Astrid didn't have the need or luxury of those traits.

"So, I guess it's just you and me, huh?" he asked her.

"Nope," Astrid corrected him, "just you." And she ducked out of the way as the Gronckle fired again, knocking Hiccup's shield right out of his hands and leaving him exposed to attack.

"One shot left!"

Hiccup had raced after the shield, but it was rolling away from him faster than he could run, and the Gronckle was gaining on him. It had him pinned in a matter of seconds.

"Hiccup!" The worry was evident in Gobber's voice as lumbered over to the boy, but Astrid was faster.

"\_Hya!\_" Astrid struck the dragon with the flat side of her axe, sending it flying, the meant to take off Hiccup's head instead connecting with the wall. Astrid breathed in and out slowly, throwing aside the shield that she would no longer need as Gobber wrestled the Gronckle back into its cage with a mutter of "Go back to bed, ya overgrown sausage!"

"Thanks," Hiccup all but squeaked.

She spared him a glance. He was so white that his freckles were like light brown beacons on his face. "Don't sweat it."

"Well done, Astrid," he complimented, "but all of you remember (Astrid noticed he was speaking more to Hiccup than to the rest of them) a dragon will always, \_always\_ go for the kill."

Hiccup still seemed a bit confused and startled, though that might have been the shock from the attack talking.

"Dismissed!"

Faster than Hiccup could blink, Astrid had gone, like a ghost on the wind. His heart hammered in his chest that had nothing to do with the girl of his dreams. He braced his hands to his knees, breathing in and out slowly. She had just saved his life; he might've been dead if

it wasn't for her!

But he couldn't help but wonder if that was the truth. If dragons always went for the kill, then why hadn't the Night Fury killed him when he had the chance?

\* \* \*

><p>The crack of lightning awoke Astrid rather early in the morning, when exactly, she couldn't quite be sure, but she was no less grateful to be wrenched from yet another dream of fire; they seemed to be plaguing her rather frequently these days. Out of habit, Astrid pulled her axe from where it lay under her pillow and made the journey downstairs to sit before the barely burning fire that was little more than a pile of smoldering ash.<p>

She winced as Thor's Wrath struck the house, the bolt of lightning peeling a hole into her ceiling and allowing rain to pour inside, soaking a circular spot on the floor in seconds.

Astrid groaned in annoyance, splaying her body out on the couch before the fire as she tried to delay from getting up and finding a bucket to collect the water, but hardly a minute later she was up and the water was already being collected in a bin.

She stayed awake awhile after that, the peppering of the rain and the sharp flash of lightning keeping her lucid. She wasn't sure if she was glad or not about that.

She exhaled loudly, her thoughts drifting back to her parents, as they often did when she was left to her thoughts for too long. The villagers talked when they thought that she could not hear. Mostly about her violent tendencies, but she communicated through punches, much better than anything else, and often they whispered about Hiccup.

It aggravated her, of course, it wasn't as though Hiccup tried to be as terrible as he was (he had caused half the destruction of the village without the help of dragons by the age of twelve), but they didn't need to make him feel worse than he already did.

"Forget about him," Astrid grumbled to herself, "get some sleep."

So she fell into a fitful sleep that could hardly be deemed sleep, waking far too early and feeling much too exhausted. She dumped the water out onto the front porch and stepped outside to survey the damage. It wasn't as bad as it seemed; the storm that night had only ripped a few shingles off her roof, and the hole could be dealt with easily. Most of the shingles were made of common stone, but these ones her father had crafted himself, made of iron, and they were dented from the lightning and the fall.

Astrid picked them up silently and trudged through town to the empty and cold forge, searching for a way to fix the damage that had been done to the pieces of metal.

And so, that led to Astrid hacking away savagely at one of the shingles as the sun rose higher and higher. "Come on!" she growled. "Go back to norm-"

"Astrid?"

She swung around to face Hiccup, embarrassment coloring her face as she took in his surprise to find her in the forge. She was sure she looked quite a sight holding a hammer in one hand and a shingle in the other with an angry expression on her face. "Um, Hiccup, I wasn't expecting you." She hid the items behind her back quickly. "I'm uh--"

He glanced behind her to where she was hiding the shingles. "Was your house hit during the storm last night?"

Astrid blew out her cheeks like a blowfish before exhaling the air. "Yes," she said in an off-hand manner, finally conceding, "It tore off a few shingles and put a dent in them."

Hiccup moved past her, pulling the shingle she was holding from her grip and examining it for a few brief moments. "You're hitting it too hard," he mused, "what you need to do, hang on--"

He ducked to grab something and then he turned back to her. Astrid briefly allowed her eyes to slip downwards before fastening them quickly upwards once he had turned around.

"Here."

He handed her a smaller tool that she wouldn't have been able to recognize if she had ever been given the opportunity. "This should do the trick." Her fingers brushed against his as he gave it to her and Astrid viciously suppressed a flare of heat at the touch.

"Thanks," she said shortly, taking it and hammering slowly and softly, starting in surprise as the warped metal returned to its original shape, albeit still with a black burn across it. "Hey, it worked! Thanks."

Hiccup scratched the back of his head uncomfortably and Astrid could see a flush of heat warming his face. "No problem. Ah-no, you're holding it wrong." He took her hand and corrected her grip. "Your thumb has to be at the head, if you just wrap it around the hilt you put more dents into it."

"Oh, thanks," Astrid repeated, feeling a little warm from his touch, and therefore irritated. She was a Hofferson! She shouldn't be feeling like those giggling girls that gossiped about boys more than focused on training. Now all she wanted to do was whack herself on the head something hard and wooden. Astrid eyed the table in contemplation—or maybe not.

"No holes in your roof, then?" she asked in a would-be casual voice that surprisingly fooled him. But she had no way of knowing that Hiccup was far too busy thinking about things such as the Night Fury he had unintentionally trapped in the Cove.

"No," Hiccup said, fiddling with his notebook and making notes on spare parchment with his charcoal pencil. Astrid tried to glance over them, her curious nature rearing its head, but he had put it away in a matter of seconds. "No Wrath of Thor for me." His sarcasm was blaringly obvious, but Astrid tried her best not to mention it, turning back to her work, being extra careful not to deliberately

ruin a shingle so Hiccup would have to correct her again, his touch warm and comforting against her skin. But you wouldn't catch her admitting that to anyone, not even to the person whom she was referring to.

\* \* \*

><p>The next lesson they had was on the Deadly Nadder. Now, while the Deadly Nadder were regarded as one of the most beautiful species of dragons (despite having a strangely almost parrot-like appearance), they were also one of the most dangerous. They could breathe fire and had a nasty habit of shooting tail spikes that were as sharp as Astrid's axe at its enemies.<p>

The arena was set up more like a maze and Astrid kept close to one of the sides, eyeing her surroundings for the Nadder, keeping her grip on her shield and axe tight and ready for action.

"Today," Gobber said loudly over all of them, "is all about attack."

Astrid had to duck away as the Nadder hopped on top of the maze walls, being careful to not be seen as she took up a new spot to watch it closely.

"Nadders are quick and light on their feet. Your job is to be quicker and lighter."

Talk about a difficult task! How on earth were they supposed to be faster and lighter than a Deadly Nadder? She sighed. Though she admitted, the Nadder in question was rather beautiful, it wasn't going to stop her from using her axe on it.

"Look for its blind spot," Gobber added, sounding almost bored. Astrid was almost insulted. Why didn't he come in here and take on the Nadder himself? "Every dragon has one. Find it, hide in it, and strike."

Hiccup's voice rang loudly, and Astrid only heard half of what he said. "I know, I know, but hypothetically--"

"\_Hiccup!\_" she hissed and his eyes met hers and she made a motion, mouthing, "Get down!"

Astrid glanced around the wall to where the Nadder was meandering slowly forward, tilting its head to and fro. Once it had glanced away, Astrid took a chance and cart-wheeled with her shield to the other wall, rushing as Snotlout followed her and Hiccupâ€¦failed to.

The Nadder gave a squawk, leaping down so that it was before her. Astrid's eyes narrowed as she placed her shield protectively in front of her chest while poising her axe to strike when Snotlout pushed her aside suddenly. "\_Hey!\_" she complained, irritation and annoyance seeping into her voice.

"Watch out, babe," he said with smug superiority, "I've got this."

Her eyebrow twitched and she glared as he threw his mace, but it



missed the Nadder's head, connecting with the wall and falling to the floor. She scowl deepened as he turned back to her, her lip curled slightly in disapproval. Did he think this was going to impress her?

"The sun was in my eyes, Astrid," Snotlout complained as the Nadder aimed a blast at him and the pair was sent running. "What do you want me to do, block out the sun? I could do that, but I don't have time right now!"

As if it was possible to block out the sun!

Astrid gave a small yelp as the Nadder gave up on Snotlout, instead chasing after her, knocking down walls as it went. Astrid jumped from falling wall to falling wall to avoid being shot by its tail spines, and she was going to land on- "Hiccup!"

He didn't seem to have been able to move, or at least, he was far too surprised to do so, and she fell right on top of him, her axe stuck in his shield as she tried her hardest to not notice just how green his eyes were or how many freckles his cheeks did have as she struggled to free it.

"Oooh! Love on the battlefield!" Tuffnut chuckled to Ruffnut.

"She could do better," Ruffnut cackled, making Astrid's insides churn with humiliation.

"Just-let me-why don't you-" Hiccup was trying to talk, but Astrid was beyond done, standing up and yanking axe and shield from his arm to smash it against the Nadder's head, making it fall away and whimper and a yelp, reeling off to the side to lick its wounds (in a figure of speaking).

She inhaled and exhaled, her heart hammering so loudly in her ears that she almost didn't hear Gobber when he said "Good work, Astrid."

And then she turned back to Hiccup, cowering on the ground.

"Is this just some kind of joke to you?!" she demanded, angry at Hiccup for being so spineless, angry at Ruffnut and Tuffnut for what they had said, and angry at herself for falling for someone so un-Viking. "Our parents war is about to become ours!" She glared, pointing her wood-embedded axe at the boy. "Figure out which side you're on!" She turned on her heel and stalked out of the arena, ignoring Snotlout as he shouted endearments after her; she couldn't have cared less.

People steered clear of her as she moved past them, her scowl dark as she slammed the door to her house shut, giving a roar of frustration as she threw herself into the armchair before the raging fire.

It was heartless to say those things to him he knew, but how could he not take this training seriously? One day he was going to find himself with a dragon before him and she prayed to Odin that he wouldn't try to take it home as a pet.

**\*\*AN:** Chapter two is finished! About the whole lightning thing: the Vikings don't actually know that metal attracts lightning, so

eventually Astrid is going to have to take those shingles down, but right now, none of the Berkians actually have any idea about it. I hoped you liked it! It wanted to capitalize a bit on Astrid's warring emotions, so that's basically what happened this whole chapter.\*\*

**\*\*REVIEW!\*\***

End  
file.